

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 2204

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT PFOR CO CU

SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. NEITHER THE RECOGNITION OF CUBA NOR THE IMPENDING SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONGRESS COULD COMMAND SUFFICIENT ATTENTION TO DIVERT COLOMBIANS FROM THEIR FASCINATION WITH THE CASE OF THE PUTATIVE LADY GOVERNOR OF RISARALDA DEPARTMENT. THE MATTER OF CIVIL MARRIAGE, WHICH MOST COLOMBIANS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN RESOLVED WITH THE 1974 RATIFICATION OF THE NEW CHURCH-STATE CONCORDAT, WAS THE OSTENSIBLE CAUSE FOR A CHURCH PROTEST AGAINST THE APPOINTMENT OF THE GOVERNOR. OF LONGER TERM SIGNIFICANCE BUT OF LESS INTEREST TO THE PUBLIC WAS THE MARCH 6 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT COLOMBIA AND CUBA HAD RESUMED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. THE APPARENT SLOWING OF THE INFLATION RATE ALSO FAILED TO SPARK MUCH DISCUSSION AMONG THE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC WHICH, AFTER EXPERIENCING SEVERAL YEARS OF SHARPLY RISING PRICES, WILL WAIT TO SEE IT BEFORE THEY BELIEVE IT. END SUMMARY.

2. CUBA - THE SLIPPER DROPS. FOREIGN MIN LIEVANO ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 6 THAT COLOMBIA AND CUBA HAD RESUMED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. THE ANNOUNCEMENTS CAUSED LITTLE REACTION AMONG THE PUBLIC AT LARGE. THE FEBRUARY 21 STATEMENT (BOGOTA 1691) BY THE MIN THAT HE HAD INITIATED THE STEPS NECESSARY FOR THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF

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RELATIONS BETWEEN CUBA AND COLOMBIA HAD BEEN THE DECISIVE AN-

NOUNCEMENT. THE MARCH 6 STATEMENT WAS, ACCORDINGLY, VIEWED ONLY AS THE COMPLETION OF THE PROCESS. IN ANSWERING QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS, LIEVANO SAID THAT THE COMPOSITION OF THE TWO NEW EMBASSIES HAD YET TO BE AGREED UPON. THE MIN DESCRIBED THE GOC DECISION AS ONE THAT HELPED TO DISMANTLE THE COLD WAR IN LATIN AMERICA. LIEVANO SAID THAT NEITHER THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES NOR THE RIO TREATY WOULD SUFFER FROM THE COLOMBIAN RENEWAL OF CUBAN RELATIONS. HE DESCRIBED THE OAS AND THE RIO TREATY AS "ELEMENTS THAT WE ARE GOING TO DEFEND AND STRENGTHEN".

3. CHURCH VETO OF LOPEZ GOVERNOR APPOINTMENT CONTINUES TO REVERBERATE. PRESIDENT LOPEZ' APPOINTMENT OF MRS. DORA LUZ CAMPO DE BOTERO AS GOVERNOR OF RISARALDA WHICH BROUGHT A NEGATIVE REACTION ON THE PART OF CHURCH OFFICIALS IN THAT DEPARTMENT FOR "MORAL REASONS" (BOGOTA 2114) CONTINUED TO REVERBERATE THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. THE ISSUE APPEARED TO REVOLVE AROUND HER SECOND (CIVIL) MARRIAGE IN VENEZUELA; SHE HAD INITIALLY BEEN MARRIED BY THE CHURCH IN COLOMBIA. BY WEEK'S END MRS. BOTERO, BOLSTERED BY SUPPORT FROM VARIOUS GROUPS AND IMPORTANT INDIVIDUALS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, APPEARED DETERMINED TO ACCEPT THE POSITION, ALTHOUGH EARLIER IN THE WEEK SHE SEEMED ON THE VERGE OF RESIGNING. EL ESPECTADOR ON MARCH 7 LAUNCHED A PUBLIC OPINION POLL REQUESTING READERS TO SEND IN A BALLOT APPEARING IN THE PAPER TO VOTE FOR OR AGAINST THE CHURCH VETO OF THE GOVERNOR NOMINEE. RISARALDA REP GLORIA GAITAN, MEANWHILE, PROBABLY CORRECTLY ACCUSED EVERYBODY OF LOSING SIGHT OF THE PRINCIPAL ISSUE INVOLVED, IE., THE QUALIFICATIONS OF MRS. BOTERO TO DO THE JOB. REP GAITAN, WHO ACCUSED MRS. BOTERO OF LACKING THE PROPER PREPARATION TO BE GOVERNOR, SAID THAT IT MATTERED LITTLE WHETHER MRS. BOTERO WAS "MORALLY FIT" FOR THE JOB.

4. COST OF LIVING INCREASES MAY BE MODERATING. AFTER A DISAPPOINTING 2.7 PC INCREASE IN THE COST OF LIVING INDEX DURING JANUARY, THE FEB INCREASE OF 1.7 PC SUGGESTS THAT GOC EFFORTS TO BRING INFLATION UNDER CONTROL MAY BE HAVING SOME EFFECT. THE JAN RATE WAS ABOUT THE SAME AS IN 1974 BUT FEB REPRESENTED A SIGNIFICANT DROP COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS YEAR. FOOD PRICES CONTINUE TO SHOW THE HIGHEST INCREASES, AND THE INDEX FOR BLUE COLLAR WORKERS CONTINUES TO RUN AHEAD OF THE WHITE COLLAR INDEX. BLUE COLLAR FOOD COSTS (A SEPARATE INDEX IS KEPT FOR LOWER INCOME DIETS) CONFIDENTIAL

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HAVE INCREASED 42 PC IN BOGOTA DURING THE PAST 12 MONTHS. THE KEY INDICATOR AS TO WHETHER OR NOT INFLATION IS ABATING WILL BE THE MARCH INDEX WHICH UNUSUALLY SHOWS THE HIGHEST MONTHLY INCREASE DURING THE YEAR AS A RESULT OF CROP CYCLES AND THE DELAYED EFFECT OF FOURTH QUARTER INCREASES IN MONEY SUPPLY.

5. TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (CSTC) UNITY CONGRESS DISUNITED. THE SO-CALLED SECOND UNITY CONGRESS OF THE

CSTC BEGAN MAR 4 ON A NOTE OF DISUNITY WHEN THE REVOLUTIONARY AND INDEPENDENT WORKERS MOVEMENT (MOIR) WHICH HAD RECENTLY JOINED THE CSTC ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD NOT ATTEND THE CONGRESS AND ALSO ORDERED ITS AFFILIATES TO WITHDRAW. MOIR PUBLICLY BLAMED THE CSTC FOR THE FAILURE OF THE RECENT BANKWORKERS STRIKE AS THE REASON FOR THEIR DECISION. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO EMB SOURCES, MOIR LEADERS WERE UNHAPPY BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT GIVEN WHAT THEY CONSIDERED A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF DELEGATES TO THE CONGRESS. THE CSTC ON THE OTHER HAND DESCRIBED THE MOIR AS REVOLUTIONARIES WITHOUT PURPOSE. OTHERWISE THE CONGRESS PROGRESSED IN A NORMAL FASHION WITH SPEAKERS DENOUNCING THE GOC, THE OLIGARCHY AND "YANKEE IMPERIALISM". GUEST DELS INCLUDED REPS FROM THE USSR, POLAND, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, EAST GERMANY, CUBA, CHILE, VENEZUELA AND PANAMA. THE EUROPEAN DELS MAY HAVE BEEN THE MOST UNIFIED SECTOR IN THE UNITY CONGRESS. EL TIEMPO PUBLISHED A PHOTO MARCH 6 SHOWING THEM UNIFORMLY ASLEEP DURING THE DELIBERATIONS. THE CONGRESS IS SCHEDULED TO END MARCH 8.

6. CUSTOMS COORDINATION WITH VENEZUELA. THE BOGOTA PRESS REPORTED THAT THE DIRECTORS OF CUSTOMS OF COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA HAD SIGNED AN AGREEMENT FOR CUSTOMS COOPERATION IN CARACAS LAST WEEK. THE AGREEMENT IS BILLED AS AN EXAMPLE OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION GROWING OUT OF THE RECENT MEETING OF THE TWO FINANCE MINS. IT BASICALLY RELAXES SOME REQUIREMENTS ON VEHICULAR TRAFFIC ACROSS THE BORDER, AND CALLS FOR GREATER EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AS WELL AS FOR COORDINATION ON THE BRUSSELS CUSTOMS COOPERATION COUNCIL MATTERS. VEHICULAR CROSSINGS BETWEEN CUCUTA AND SAN CRISTOBAL HAVE LONG BEEN A SORE POINT AND ANY DIMINUTION OF IRRITANTS WOULD BE A USEFUL STEP FORWARD.

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